

VZCZCXR05829

PP RUEHAG RUEHDF RUEHIK RUEHKW RUEHLN RUEHLZ RUEHPOD RUEHROV RUEHVK

RUEHYG

DE RUEHWWR #2399/01 3531622

ZNR UUUUU ZZH

P 191622Z DEC 07

FM AMEMBASSY WARSAW

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5665

INFO RUCNEEC/EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 WARSAW 002399

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PBTS](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [SMIG](#) [PGOV](#) [EU](#) [PL](#)

SUBJECT: POLAND'S ENTRY INTO THE SCHENGEN ZONE

REF: WARSAW 002337

Summary

[¶1.](#) On December 21, 2007, Poland will join the European Union's Schengen area along with seven other Central European nations and Malta. After months of preparation and coordination with other EU members, Poland is ready to enter the Schengen zone and, with its 1185 km eastern frontier, defend the longest EU external border. Embassy Warsaw had the opportunity to discuss their accession with EU member state representatives and various government officials.

Poland ---a Member of Schengen Zone

[¶2.](#) Once Poland enters the Schengen area on December 21, land and water border checks from Poland to other Schengen countries will be abolished. (Note: At the airports, passports checks will continue until March 2008.) Named after a small village in Luxembourg where it was signed in 1985, the Schengen Agreement also includes provisions to establish common policies on the temporary entry of persons (i.e. Schengen visa), the harmonization of external border controls and cross-border police cooperation. While the Government of Poland (GOP) will continue to combat smuggling and illegal immigration, the border police will now work in mobile units throughout the country instead of just on the actual border. The Polish border patrol has said it will also be responsible for fighting drug trafficking and the illegal removal of cultural relicts from the country.

Preparations for Schengen

[¶3.](#) After months of preparation, Poland is ready to enter the Schengen zone. According to the Minister of Interior Grzegorz Schetyna, who praised the pre-accession efforts of his predecessor, Poland is in fact better prepared to operate within the zone than some current Schengen members. The new Schengen countries - the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Malta, Slovakia, Slovenia and Poland - all had to undergo numerous assessments of their readiness and adapt their infrastructure to meet EU requirements. During the last two years, Poland has hosted six EU evaluation missions, two of which were airport assessments. The GOP developed an accession plan based on their experience, the advice of other EU members already in the Schengen area, and the input of the EU assessment teams. Some of the reform suggestions included language training for officers, computer infrastructure development, mobile teams and new equipment for green borders.

Costs and New Investments

¶4. To date, 1.5 billion PLN (approx. USD 600 million) has been spent on "fortifying Poland's borders" for Schengen, including modernization of external border controls, acquisition of specialized equipment and provision of border guard and police training, with significant funding from EU resources. Norway and Switzerland also provided separate bilateral assistance. Border Guard (BG) Headquarters staff stressed that the GOP was required to fund at least 20% of all projects, even those funded by the EU. Most of these funds went towards the purchase of specialized equipment to include: a radar system for the Polish maritime border, surveillance vehicles, mobile/hand-held systems and thermal cameras for the land borders. The replacement of out-dated equipment such as computer equipment continues.

SIS Shared Database System

¶5. According to Ministry of Interior officials, the main problems with Poland's Schengen accession were not related to physical control of the borders, but rather the integration and upgrading of Poland's computer systems. The Schengen Information System (SIS) is a security database system operated by members of the Schengen zone. SIS I is the initial version of the system in use since the inception of the Schengen zone. All Schengen countries contribute data to the system through their national databases to facilitate cooperation between police forces in the fight against terrorism, organized crime, illegal immigration and human smuggling. SIS stores information on wanted and missing persons and other persons barred from entering or staying in the zone. It also contains data on stolen goods, firearms, and documents.

¶6. The SIS II is a more sophisticated version of the system

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which will feature biometric data. Although originally planned for 2008, all countries are now expected to be connected to the system by 2009. "SISone4all" is a compromise information system that was proposed when it became clear that the introduction of SIS II would be delayed. SISone4all is an updated version of SIS I, which facilitates the connection of new members states before the eventual launch of SIS II. The SIS system has been operating in Poland since September 3, 2007. Col. Roman Lubinski, Director of the Border Trafficking Department, BG Headquarters, praised the effectiveness of the system. Between September 3 and December 2, the BG stopped 4190 persons at border crossings and 352 inside the country with the use of the SIS system. These numbers include persons with EU Arrest Warrants or those barred from entering the Schengen zone.

Changes

¶8. Scrapping stationary border control points and passport checks at land and sea borders with fellow Schengen members will not weaken Poland's security situation; instead, other security checks will be introduced. To improve operations, the current Polish border patrol has expanded the number and activity of its mobile patrols. Their range of operations has been expanded to include regions beyond the border area and throughout the whole territory of Poland. Mobile patrols will conduct inspections and random checks to investigate whether certain individuals are registered as "wanted" within the EU.

¶9. Poland is aware that appropriate BG training is essential, since they will be responsible for guaranteeing that the EU's longest external border remains impermeable. There is an ongoing training for border guard officers on the SIS system which all entry-level officers arriving at the BG Training Academy receive. For those already in the BG, officers are trained under the train-the-trainer system. In addition, many officers are now receiving English language training, keeping

in mind that Russian is still the key language for officers working on Poland's eastern border.

¶10. While in some neighboring EU states such as Germany, police and customs officers voiced their opposition to job cuts, Director Lubinski confirmed that no BG officers will be dismissed due to the removal of internal EU borders - nor will there be wholesale transfers to the eastern borders. Rather, the officers previously working on the internal borders will be given new roles, including as part of the mobile patrols. (NOTE: There are currently 17,000 officers and 4,000 civilians working for the BG. END NOTE)

Eastern External Borders

¶11. Poland borders two countries to the east, Belarus and Ukraine, neither one a member of Schengen or the EU. Border inspections will be carried out as previously, although centers have been relocated at certain border crossings. Until recently, many of Poland's border crossing stations with Ukraine and Belarus were co-located on the territory of one country, and often not on Polish territory. EU border control officials concluded that such a situation could be problematic, for example in attempting to enforce an EU arrest warrant for a Ukrainian citizen caught at a Polish border crossing station located on Ukrainian territory - where neither Poland nor the EU has jurisdiction. Therefore, the Polish BG has agreed to move all Polish border control checkpoints onto Polish territory. Security measures on the "green borders" have also undergone significant changes to further reduce illegal activity. The GOP has set up checkpoints every 20 km to monitor its eastern border and built high-tech frontier surveillance centers where officers monitor multiple plasma screens relaying pictures from thermal imaging cameras along the length of the border.

Illegal Migrants and Refugees

¶12. According to BG data, between January and November 2007, there were almost 3,000 "border crimes" committed by illegal migrants at the Polish border. The majority of these came from Ukraine, and according to Director Lubinski, the Polish-Ukrainian border is a major concern for the Polish BG. The BG is not expecting a significant change in the number of legitimate asylum seekers (including potential refugees) to Poland: they consider the rise in numbers from the previous year to be a temporary phenomenon before Schengen accession. The BG is, however, getting ready for an increase in illegal migrants, and has just opened four deportation/holding centers for illegal migrants.

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¶13. As reported in reftel, Poland's Schengen accession will present problems for the hundreds of AmCits who currently, live, work and study in Poland without paper residence permits.

Frontex

¶14. Frontex, the EU agency tasked with coordinating operational cooperation between EU member states in the field of border security, established its headquarters in Warsaw in October 2005. At this point, cooperation between Poland and Frontex mostly consists of instructor exchanges, sharing of information and experiences and a limited number of joint exercises with neighbors. Poland hopes that Frontex's budget and staff increase for 2008 will positively impact cooperation between Frontex and Poland and the number of exchanges will increase.

Comment

15. The GOP has shown very strong political support across the board for the Schengen accession. In addition, the Polish Border Guard enjoys a very strong reputation for efficiency and professionalism among EU and European counterparts, as well as U.S. law enforcement agencies. While frontier posts are being torn down within the new Schengen zone and controls are being dramatically enhanced at its eastern edge, it is difficult for the GOP to completely assess the possible challenges that will come with their new responsibility.

HILLAS